

# A Condensed Transcript of Senate's Hearings With Rusk

Following is an unofficial and condensed transcript of hearings by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with Secretary of State Dean Rusk yesterday:

**Chairman J. William Fulbright:** All of us in the Senate and particularly members of this committee, feel we should be fully informed on the policies this administration intends to follow in the immediate future in Vietnam, and before the announcement is made rather than after. If there is a decision to send more men to Vietnam, we should have a reasonable time to discuss the wisdom of such a course. Our experience in this regard has not been satisfactory during the period in which we have been led gradually into the disastrous situation which is not in the best interests of the country. We should have the opportunity to register our approval or disapproval now, while it is not yet too late to draw back before the situation reaches full scale all-out war with the possible involvement of nuclear weapons if it begins.

**Secretary Rusk:** President Johnson has consulted Congress more than any recent President on a great many of these problems. He continues to do so. This meeting is a consultation, and I believe the views of the members of this committee have been set forth clearly.

**Fulbright:** I failed to learn anything yesterday as to your future plans on escalation. I find some hope in reports there are differences of view within the administration.

**Rusk:** These decisions are basically for the President to make. We have no intention of disposing of the Constitution, but Congress itself approved the Tonkin Gulf resolution which authorized the use of armed forces if necessary.

**Fulbright:** Are you saying politely that you have no intention of consulting with this committee? You believe you have the right, that we gave you the full authority with that resolution, to make these decisions without consultation? That resolution was approved after a one hour and 40 minute briefing by officials on facts which the evidence has clearly proved to be untrue. No reasonable man could say there had been no provocation for the attacks in the Gulf of Tonkin, for instance. At best, it is equivalent, I personally feel, to there was what any reasonable man would call provocation. Are we or are we not going to be told in advance what you are going to do?

**Rusk:** I said the President has reached no conclusions and therefore I have no knowledge of the actions that may be required by Congress. I cannot say more.

**Fulbright:** I conclude you mean you have no intention of telling us until you have made up your mind. We get more information from the newspapers than from the administration. Frankly I think the press is better informed than the executive. You say the President hasn't made up his mind. To me, that means you won't tell us until he has reached the decision.

**Rusk:** The views of this committee are pretty well apparent. I would say there is no mystery about your views.

## 'People Apprehensive'

**Fulbright:** Everything we do is affected by the war in Vietnam. People are apprehensive about the whole picture—there at home. I cannot recall a period in the past 100 years when we have been distracted by so many different difficulties. I think Congress has a part to play in solving them, and I think we could make a contribution. The whole feeling now is that we are at a turning point: we are either going on down the road to all-out war or pull back and put our emphasis on seeking negotiations.

**Sen. Mike Mansfield:** There is no question that the prime responsibility for these decisions rests with the President. We cannot make decisions for the President nor force him to do things our way. That was proved when we unanimously adopted a resolution requesting a new effort to take the Vietnam case to the United Nations and he apparently decided the time was not right for that. These sense of Congress resolutions have no validity, no power. What we are trying to do here is to get full consultations before the latest.

**Sen. Albert Gore:** A resolution either approving or disapproving Vietnam policy would be fruitless. I doubt if either would pass the Senate. The important thing is to avoid a catastrophic stalemate between the President and Congress which would be no more satisfactory than the military stalemate in Vietnam. We need teamwork to devise a wise policy, and haven't had it in the past. I am not sure the Senate could have saved us from this horrible mistake in Vietnam, this disaster which threatens catastrophe. We all make mistakes, but we have seen that the mistake the Senate made in accepting the administration's statements without sufficient question has contributed to a tragedy for their country.

**Sen. Frank Lausche:** I am not satisfied with what is going on in Vietnam. I want to see it come to an end as much as anyone. But in the meantime, how wonderful it would be for us if they would have this kind of a televised discussion in Hanoi. What greater service could be rendered to our side? I think Congress should vote on something should take one position or the other and then stop all this talk.

**Sen. Stuart Symington:** I do not understand that kind of talk.

I am on both the Armed Services and the Foreign Relations Committee, and on the present hardiness subcommittee. Nearly every month we put out reports critical of some phase of our effort in Vietnam—helicopters, or slow unloading of ships, or such, and nobody complains about it. Yet the minute we get to the political situation, which is of equal importance, we get a lot of criticism about helping Hanoi.

**Fulbright:** The senator is precisely correct. I cannot accept that what we are doing is against the national interest.

## No Talk Inhibitions

**Rusk:** There has been no limitation of discussion of all aspects of this situation. There have been no inhibitions on discussion, and we give enormous attention to all views. We cannot sit here and dispose of these constitutional questions in any far-reaching way. I think we should try to find some common points as a basis for discussion. Everyone agrees, for instance, that countries such as Laos and Cambodia should have their chance to live at peace, and I doubt there are many points on which there would be deep difficulties. We should search for elements of agreement and then seek to reconcile our differences. It will be available to make that effort, in the best good spirits and candor but without all the world looking in. There is no difference between your view and the administration's on the preference for a negotiated settlement.

**Sen. Clifford Case:** You said one point of general agreement is that Cambodia or Laos has the right to exist without interference from outside. I question this. There is no such thing as the right of a country to exist apart from its own willingness and ability to preserve its existence. There is a weakness in your assumption, and we should not build policy on the basis of incorrect assumptions. A condition of existence is the ability of a country to protect itself. To say there is an inherent right of this sort is the kind of oversimplification which leads to great error and the kind of difficulty we are in today.

**Rusk:** The right of all nations to live free from aggression is stated in the charter of the United Nations. The destruction of small nations by outside power is what led to World War II. Unless we resolve these problems on the basis of a society of states, then might makes right and the big powers are in direct competition, the struggle is acerbated, and we return to the law of the jungle.

**Case:** But that is a multilateral, not a national problem. It is time to get down to reality—we have not been there for a long time.

**Rusk:** I will deliberately understate my reply. I profoundly disagree with the implications of your argument.

**Gore:** I hope I have correctly detected a constructive turn toward the possibility of closer discussions between this committee and the executive department. I want to explore the possibility of agreement based on a neutral, non-aligned status for the area. You say we have offered to negotiate without conditions, yet inherent in our offers is Hanoi's acceptance of the conditions of a divided country, aligned with the west and operating under a constitution prepared under our tutelage. I would like to see everybody everywhere be pro-Western, but as long as we insist on having a South Vietnam made in our image, the war is going to last a long time. This amounts to an offer to talk peace with anybody at anytime, anywhere as long as they are willing to accept defeat on their prime objective.

**Rusk:** There is a distinction between a readiness to enter negotiations and the attitudes of both sides when the talks begin. I know there would be serious problems in the talks, but we feel at least the effort should be made. In all of the world crises since 1945, a solution has been achieved through contacts and talks. For a long time it was the Hanoi view that the only discussion possible would be on their four points, including the liberation front as the sole spokesman for South Vietnam. . . . I am not sure that is their latest and most recent position.

**Gore:** But we insist on acceptance of the government of South Vietnam?

**Rusk:** Not as a preliminary in private contacts, before negotiations. I do not see why there cannot be discussions about two countries. We have said we would talk about their four points if the points we wish raised will be talked about, too. Nothing could be fairer than that. We have even tried to negotiate a common set of points to be used as a basis for negotiations. It is not reasonable for one side to impose conditions with complete disregard to the conditions of the other side. As for neutralization—the North is in the Socialist camp and neutrality is not their cup of tea. If South Vietnam demonstrates that it desires neutrality, and if we could be sure this would be respected by the rest of the world, it would cause us no problem. We take the view that wherever a country wants to live as a member of the world community, in peace as envisioned by the U.N. Charter, it is in the interest of the United States to see that it comes about. We do not go around trying to convert neutrals to our side. I should add that the guaranteed neutrality of Laos did no good—there

are 40,000 North Vietnamese troops in that country today.

**Gore:** The protection of independent neutral states would have to be endorsed by major powers in the area.

**Rusk:** We thought we got that last year when Moscow, Peking, Hanoi and everyone else signed the accords which Hanoi later crushed aside with contempt. We are not trying to impose a solution on Vietnam, we are trying to prevent the imposition by North Vietnam of its own solution on Vietnam by force.

**Sen. Frank Church:** As sure as I am sitting here, by fall there will be more American than South Vietnamese soldiers there. I think we need a sense of proportion. We should consider how resources. It is not a question to tailor our objectives to our turning our backs on the world, but of assessing our commitments against our resources to find a national balance. This policy of sending more and more Americans to Asia is simply feeding the crocodile with American lives. The time for reappraisal is at hand.

**Sen. Karl Mundt:** We are in desperate need of a great degree of unity. Perhaps this could be built on the basis of your belief that this fight is essential to our national security and to the organization of an enduring peace.

**Rusk:** I have said that the major crisis of our day is the confrontation between those who are trying to organize a peaceful world community as set forth in the charter of the United Nations and those who want a community based on world revolution and domination. Change is going on in the world, including the Communist world. I is possible to make progress to get going in the world, but a policy of total hostility toward anyone— at least against any one except those who do battle against us in Vietnam. We do what we can to find points on which there can be some agreement, even while most of the major points do not yield to agreement.

**Mundt:** If we pulled out of Vietnam, you believe we would set in motion another chain of miscalculations, and encourage aggressions in other areas?

## View on Aggression

**Rusk:** The problem of how to respond to aggression is one of the most fundamental questions before this nation and the world. It should be thought over soberly and quietly. I recall when President Kennedy, shortly after he took office was told by Khrushchev that if the United States did not withdraw from Berlin there would be war, he replied: "Then there will be war, it will be a long, cold winter." If Khrushchev had thought this young president was bluffing, or would not have the support of his people, we do not know what might have happened. The fidelity of the U.S. commitment is so important. At the end of the day we meet our commitments. If there is any doubt of this, there will be catastrophic wars ahead. We should approach this on our knees.

**Sen. John Sherman Cooper:** I urge that we pursue the course of reconvening the Geneva conference, with acceptance of a unified Vietnam if that is the way they want it. Despite your statement about abiding by the Geneva accords, you have never said we would accept the unification of Vietnam.

**Rusk:** I have said that if South Vietnam voted reunification, we would accept it. There has been such a change in both North and South Vietnam that it is an obstacle. North Vietnam is not willing to have unification on a non-Communist basis, and South Vietnam does not want it to be Communist.

**Cooper:** You also could decide to accept Hanoi's terms on the bombing: to stop it unconditionally. It seems our only chance. It is a difficult decision but I hope circumstances arise where it could be tried. It would show Vietnam and the world that we have taken every step we can take toward peace.

**Rusk:** We are prepared for a reconvening of the Geneva conference and if the cochairmen can arrange it we will be there. We have attempted to arrange it without waiting for them to do it. As for the bombing: no one has been able to tell us that Hanoi would hold its hand in any respect if we stopped it. I would be very glad to get any different information, if anyone in the world could bring it to us.

**Sen. Claiborne Pell:** We have arrived at a watershed in our nation's history. Our total losses of young men in Vietnam are approaching the Korean total. We have already passed the point where more bombs have been dropped on Vietnam than were dropped in all of Europe during World War II. The question is whether we continue the killing so that the dead may lie in non-Communist graveyards. The suffering will soon outweigh the achievement of any objectives.

**Rusk:** I have never personally tried to put these great matters on strictly moral grounds. It is for Providence to make the judgment. I do think there has been some moral myopia in some of the discussion I have heard. Those who talk about moral values should talk about the whole moral context: as Hanoi would like to see it and as we would like to see it. If we raise moral issues, we should look at who favors a peaceful world and who does not.

**Pell:** Is there a top price we are willing to pay in Vietnam?

**Rusk:** You cannot put a price

on it. Or on any of our alliances. We have had a lot of discussion on this issue, and I suspect the world has listened to every word and will be making its own judgment.

**Pell:** They'll be weighing your words. I doubt they'll pay much attention to ours.

**Rusk:** Oh, yes, they will. They want to see what kind of country we are when the going gets tough.

We are being tested today. It is important for all of us to search our souls deeply and decide how to conduct ourselves. Other nations have faced the need, in their time, for agonizing reappraisals: France in Indochina, Belgium in the Congo. Others found formulas for extricating themselves without political convulsions. There would be humiliating defeat in vainly is not mixed up in this.

the failure to achieve our proclaimed goals in Vietnam, yet we must measure this against the consequences of more destruction and a wider war that the military leaders believe necessary to achieve victory. It requires all of us to guard our vanity and suppress our ambitions.

**Rusk:** I am quite sure that vainly is not mixed up in this.